

**Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, April 20, 1812 , from
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Ford.**

TO JOHN ADAMS J. MSS.

Monticello, April 20, 1812.

Dear Sir, —I have it now in my power to send you a piece of homespun in return for that I received from you. Not of the fine texture, or delicate character of yours, or, to drop our metaphor, not filled as that was with that display of imagination which constitutes excellence in Belles Lettres, but a mere sober, dry and formal piece of logic. *Ornari res ipsa negat*. Yet you may have enough left of your old taste for law reading, to cast an eye over some of the questions it discusses. At any rate, accept it as the offering of esteem and friendship.

You wish to know something of the Richmond and Wabash prophets. Of Nimrod Hews I never heard before. Christopher Macpherson I have known for twenty years. He is a man of color, brought up as a book-keeper by a merchant, his master, and afterwards enfranchized. He had understanding enough to post up his ledger from his journal, but not enough to bear up against hypochondriac affections, and the gloomy forebodings they inspire. He became crazy, foggy, his head always in the clouds, and rhapsodizing what neither himself nor any one else could understand. I think he told me he had visited you personally while you were in the administration, and wrote you letters, which you have probably forgotten in the mass of the correspondences of that crazy class, of whose

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complaints, and terrors, and mysticisms, the several Presidents have been the regular depositories. Macpherson was too honest to be molested by anybody, and too inoffensive to be a subject for the mad-house; although, I believe, we are told in the old book, that “every man that is mad, and maketh himself a prophet, thou shouldst put him in prison and in the stocks.”

The Wabash prophet is a very different character, more rogue than fool, if to be a rogue is not the greatest of all follies. He arose to notice while I was in the administration, and became, of course, a proper subject of inquiry for me. The inquiry was made with diligence. His declared object was the reformation of his red brethren, and their return to their pristine manner of living. He pretended to be in constant communication with the Great Spirit; that he was instructed by him to make known to the Indians that they were created by him distinct from the whites, of different natures, for different purposes and placed under different circumstances, adapted to their nature and destinies; that they must return from all the ways of the whites to the habits and opinions of their forefathers; they must not eat the flesh of hogs, of bullocks, of sheep, &c., the deer and buffalo having been created for their food; they must not make bread of wheat but of Indian corn; they must not wear linen nor woollen, but dress like their fathers in the skins and furs of animals; they must not drink ardent spirits, and I do not remember whether he extended his inhibitions to the gun and gunpowder, in favor of the bow and arrow. I concluded from all this, that he was a visionary; enveloped in the clouds of their antiquities, and vainly endeavoring to lead back his brethren to the fancied beatitudes of their golden age. I thought there was little danger of his making many proselytes from the habits and comfort they had learned from

the whites, to the hardships and privations of savagism, and no great harm if he did. We let him go on, therefore, unmolested. But his followers increased till the English thought him worth corruption and found him corruptible. I suppose his views were then changed; but his proceedings in consequence of them were after I left the administration, and are, therefore, unknown to me; nor have I ever been informed what were the particular acts on

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his part, which produced an actual commencement of hostilities on ours. I have no doubt, however, that his subsequent proceedings are but a chapter apart, like that of Henry and Lord Liverpool, in the book of the kings of England.

Of this mission of Henry, your son had got wind in the time of the embargo, and communicated it to me. But he had learned nothing of the particular agent, although, of his workings, the information he had obtained appears now to have been correct. He stated a particular which Henry has not distinctly brought forward, which was that the Eastern States were not to be required to make a formal act of separation from the Union, and to take a part in the war against it; a measure deemed much too strong for their people; but to declare themselves in a state of neutrality, in consideration of which they were to have peace and free commerce, the lure most likely to insure popular acquiescence. Having no indications of Henry as the intermediate in this negotiation of the Essex Junto, suspicions fell on Pickering, and his nephew Williams, in London. If he was wronged in this, the ground of the suspicion is to be found in his known practices and avowed

opinions, as that of his accomplices in the sameness of sentiment and of language with Henry, and subsequently by the fluttering of the wounded pigeons.

This letter, with what it encloses, has given you enough, I presume, of law and the prophets. I will only add to it, therefore, the homage of my respects to Mrs. Adams, and to yourself the assurances of affectionate esteem and respect.